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INFO RUCNSCO/UNESCO COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS FR 001474

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E.O. 12598: N/A

TAGS: [SCUL](#) [PREL](#) [UNESCO](#) [HO](#)

SUBJECT: UNESCO'S 35TH GENERAL CONFERENCE: EDUCATION MINISTERIAL AND COMMISSION MEETING

REF: PARIS FR 1407 and previous

[¶1.](#) Summary: At UNESCO's 35th General Conference, approximately 70 Education Ministers and Vice-Ministers participated in the Ministerial Roundtable October 9-10 to discuss education policy issues. The Education Commission met October 13-15 and considered the UNESCO education sector's budget for 2010-2011 and the establishment of new UNESCO education centers. A political discussion about Honduras, initiated by a resolution put forward by Brazil, ended in a compromise text with no mention of Honduras by name. (REF) End Summary.

Ministerial Looks at Major Education Policy Issues

[¶2.](#) The Education Ministers were welcomed by UNESCO Director General Koichiro Matsuura, Assistant Director General for Education Nick Burnett and by two youth delegates (from the Philippines and Saudi Arabia) representing UNESCO's Youth Forum. Manitoba's Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy Diane McGifford moderated the first session which addressed, "Knowledge, Values, Competencies, and Skills for Today's and Tomorrow's Societies." Keynote speakers included Russia's Minister of Education and Science, who stressed mathematics education, and Tunisia's Minister of Education, who focused on the use of information and communications technologies in the classroom. The important role technology can play in education as well as the teaching of technology skills that are needed in the workplace were themes of many country interventions.

[¶3.](#) U.S. Department of Education Senior Counselor Marshall Smith outlined U.S. efforts to better equip students at the K-12 levels by promoting reforms and innovation at all levels. Mr. Smith also touched on efforts at the post-secondary level to provide job training, specifically focusing on community colleges.

[¶4.](#) The second ministerial session focused on building inclusive, equitable and high quality education systems. Interventions included calls for free, compulsory and relevant education (Norway, Finland); securing the right to education (Pakistan); and establishing universal preschool (Sweden). The U.S. intervention focused on the importance of recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers and principals and on the need to help states and districts improve schools that have continually lagged behind other schools.

[¶5.](#) OECD Secretary General, Angel Gurría, delivered the keynote to start the third ministerial session. He said we are facing the "greatest job crisis of our lifetime." He said students needed greater financial literacy and training to be collaborators and innovators. Several member states spoke about the challenge to alter the general perception of technical and vocational education to promote greater awareness of the skills and economic relevance of this sector. The U.S. stated strong support for UNESCO's Education for All goals and the United States' commitment to help countries improve access to and the overall quality of their education systems.

Education Commission - Broad Consensus Except on Honduras and Holocaust Education

¶6. On Monday, October 19, Member States convened to consider and adopt the agenda items discussed in the Education Commission report, which resulted from the Commission's deliberations October 12-15. The Commission was chaired by South Africa's Duncan Hindle. The co-chairs were from Spain, Serbia, Grenada, and the Solomon Islands.

¶7. The Commission's first debate considered the education portion of the UNESCO draft program and budget for 2010-2011. The education budget of UNESCO for the coming biennium focuses on four key areas - literacy, teachers, technical and vocational education, and sector-wide planning for education - with special emphasis on the needs of Africa and gender equality. Speakers generally expressed support for the 2010-2011 budget, especially its focus on technical and vocational education. Many countries called for more attention on gender equality and challenged UNESCO to move towards outcome-based results. There was also general support for the UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network (ASPnet) and for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD).

¶8. Member states considered 15 draft budget resolutions, some with budgetary implications and others with proposed changes to main program items and expected results. The United States sponsored two budget resolutions: one resolution focusing on promoting UNESCO's work in Open Education Resources (OER) to improve access at all education levels to quality learning and training materials; the other emphasizing UNESCO's coordination function for the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD). The U.S. gained 11 co-sponsors for the OER resolution: Belgium, Cameroon, Egypt, Jordan, Mali, the Netherlands, Oman, the Philippines, South Africa, Spain, and the United Kingdom. The U.S. gained 3 co-sponsors for the UNLD resolution: India, Nigeria, and Mali.

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¶9. France proposed a budget resolution (co-sponsored by Belgium, the Netherlands, and Poland) to include a mention of UNESCO's continuing work on Holocaust education and combating anti-Semitism, pursuant to a General Conference resolution adopted two years ago that requested the Director-General to consult with the United Nations Secretary-General to explore the role UNESCO could play in promoting awareness of Holocaust remembrance through education and combating all forms of Holocaust denial. Member states spoke in favor of the French resolution (the Netherlands, Canada, Germany, Poland, and the United States), but others sought to reopen the debate as to whether UNESCO should be involved in Holocaust remembrance including Iran, Jordan, Syria, Egypt, and the UAE. The Chair of the Education Commission suggested a working group be formed to seek consensus language on the resolution. The French Ambassador chaired the working group which included Libya, Syria, Qatar, Jordan, Belgium, Syria, the Netherlands, India, Germany, and the United States. The French Ambassador and the DCM at the U.S. Mission to UNESCO helped focus the working group's attention on the actual language contained in the French budget amendment, which addressed a required technical issue, and the working group agreed on a consensus text that would reference UNESCO's specific work on Holocaust remembrance in the more detailed Volume II of the budget. When the consensus text was presented to the whole Education Commission, Iran spoke against consensus but the India Ambassador to UNESCO helped gain consensus on the final decision.

¶10. During Commission's second debate, member states joined consensus on four draft decisions: 1) approving amendments to the statutes of the Intergovernmental Regional Committee for the Regional Education Project in Latin America; 2) requesting the Director-General to convene two international conferences to examine amendments to existing higher education recognition conventions for the African States and Asia and the Pacific; 3) requesting the Director-General to gather expertise to consider approaches for debt swaps for education and other approaches to education financing; and 4) inviting the Director-General to continue implementing a resolution concerning educational and cultural institutions in the Arab territories.

¶11. In the third debate, member states expressed support for the

Decade for Education for Sustainable Development (DESD), joining consensus on a resolution submitted by Finland, Germany, Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines, and the Republic of Korea supporting UNESCO's efforts to draft a strategy for the second half of the decade, endorsing the Bonn Declaration (adopted at the World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development), and welcoming Japan's offer to host the end-of-decade conference. The commission also adopted a resolution submitted by Russia to request the Director-General to convene the World Conference on Early Childhood Education in Moscow from September 22 - 24, 2010.

¶12. In the fourth debate, member states approved the establishment of a new Category I education institute in India: the Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development. All of the costs, will be funded by India with the exception of a D-1 post (approximately \$500K over the biennium) that will be funded through existing resources.

¶13. In the final debate, member states adopted a general resolution requesting the Director-General to follow developments within UNESCO's competence in the interest of the right to education and freedom of expression.

Honduras

¶14. As noted above and in reftel, the Education Commission became the battleground for a proposed resolution on Honduras. Brazil with the support of many Latin American states submitted a draft resolution condemning disruptions of the educational system in Honduras and the suspension of civil liberties which was referred by the President of the General Conference (a Bahamian national) to the Education Commission. The U.S., Canada, Colombia and several others states strongly objected to a country-specific resolution of condemnation, arguing that such resolutions are normal practice in New York and Geneva but not at UNESCO. The U.S. and its friends also argued that the Organization of American States (OAS) was actively involved in trying to broker a peaceful settlement of the crisis, and that UNESCO intervention could potentially disrupt delicate talks in Tegucigalpa. In the end a working group was convened and agreement reached on a resolution text without a title and that did not mention Honduras by name (see Para 16 below for the text of this resolution).

¶15. The Education Commission's Report was approved by the General Conference Plenary with no changes, but, after its adoption Brazil, Venezuela, Cuba, Argentina, and the Dominican Republic quickly lined up to express their thanks to the working group, which they described as recognizing the urgency of the situation in Honduras, especially in regard to education and freedom of expression. The U.S. and Canada also spoke, appreciating the working group's efforts but firmly asserting that consensus was reached only because the text was not country specific and because there are other countries

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to which it could apply.

¶16. Following is the text of the Resolution:

Begin Text.

The General Conference,

¶1. Taking into account the Constitution of UNESCO and in particular its Article 1,

¶2. Reiterating the democracy and civil liberties remain the best guarantee for the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the context of UNESCO's core mandate,

¶3. Underlining the possible negative impacts on the functions of an education system resulting from a breakdown of a democratic system.

¶4. Stressing its desire for UNESCO to continue to provide its support to Member States whose education systems may have been disrupted,

15. Requests the Director-General to follow developments within the fields of competence of UNESCO in the interests of the right to education and freedom of expression.

End Text.

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